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Professional Cuddling: Stigma, Market Business Plan

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**PROFESSIONAL CUDDLING:
STIGMA, MARKET, BUSINESS PLAN**

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Business Administration**

In the Bertolon School of Business
at Salem State University

By
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Abstract

Professional cuddling is an emerging business that has attracted media attention from major news sources. However there is little research on professional cuddling or its industry. A twenty-seven question survey designed to research potential stigmas, market, and opinions was distributed through social media and email. Based on preliminary results there is a market and interest for professional cuddling. Both the opinions and stigmas regarding professional cuddling are mixed. Through the presentation of the study and subsequent business plan, the business world will gain the knowledge of this burgeoning field and its feasibility. The world of business will also potentially gain a new company and new jobs.

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Introduction

Touch is a key aspect in human relationships. From birth, babies are to be held and cuddled. Those that are not will stop developing and eventually die (Szalavitiz, 2010). Cuddling is defined as “an intimate, physical, and loving contact that does not involve sexual behavior and that involves some degree of whole body touching (i.e. not just hand-hand or lips-lips” (van Anders, 2013,p.553) Despite the inherent need to be touched, “three out of every four adults agree that Americans suffer from skin hunger” (Floyd, 2013). Skin hunger is the desire to receive more affection than people are currently receiving (Floyd, 2013). Cuddling is viewed by scientists as a form of “socializing” in both animals and humans (Haederle, 2013). Cuddling is present in many relationships from platonic to romantic. Cuddling and hugging release the hormone oxytocin, which helps reduce blood pressure and stress (How Hugging, 2013). Cuddling also has numerous benefits like improving mood, strengthen immune system, and improving sleep (How Hugging, 2013). It is a way to convey not only intimacy with another person, but affection.

Professional cuddling is a new industry where the client cuddles, spoons, touches, sits next to, and spends time with the cuddler. The industry was first noticed in the early 2000s when Cuddle Sanctuary was formed (Volpe, 2017).Since Cuddle sanctuary many companies such as Snuggle Buddies and Cuddlist have been created to serve this new market. According to SnuggleBuddies and Cuddlist in their code of contact there is no sexual contact and all interactions remain platonic. Though it is still debated whether professional cuddling is sex work, massage, talk therapy, or a combination of all of them (Herman, 2015). Due to the intimate nature of cuddling there may be stigma around professional cuddling, from the people who provide the service to the clients who receive the service. To research the potential stigma,

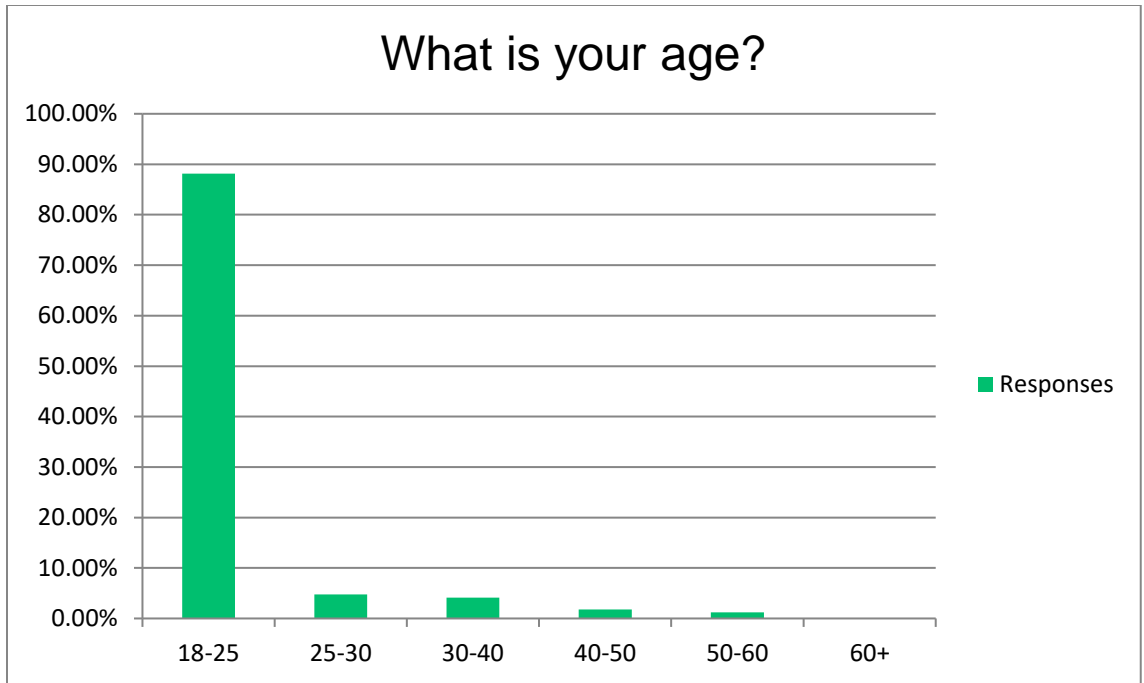
opinions, and market for professional cuddling a survey was conducted. The analysis of this research would be used to create a business plan for a professional cuddling company.

Methodology

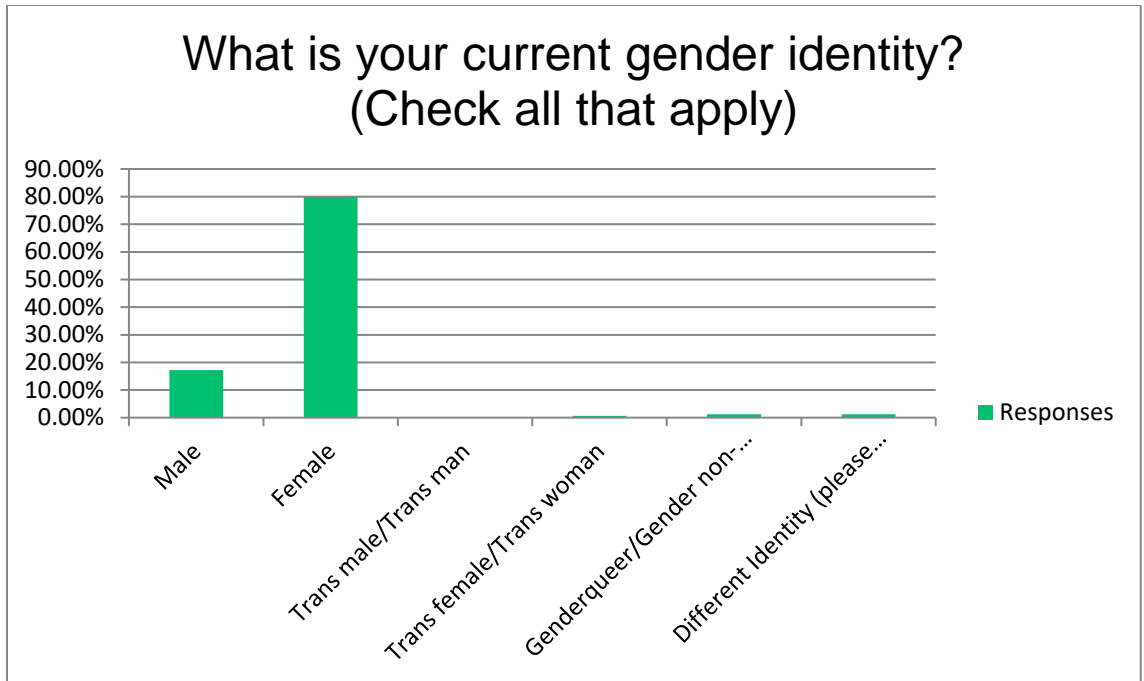
This study was designed to research potential stigmas, markets and opinions on professional cuddling. A twenty-seven question survey was delivered through Survey Monkey. Participants were recruited through social media like Facebook and email. All participants were anonymous and voluntary. The survey was open from November 1st 2017 to February 28th, 2018.

Participants

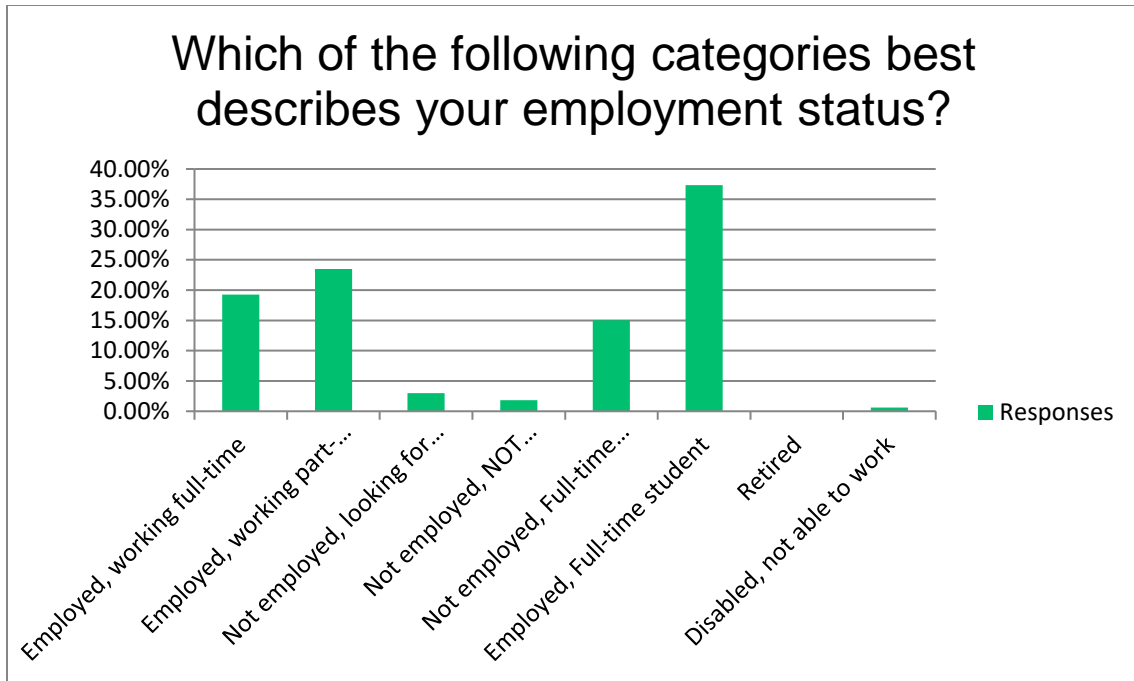
There were a total of one hundred and sixty-nine respondents to the survey. The participant's age ranged from 18-60. Of the one hundred and sixty-nine respondents 88.17% were between the ages of 18-25. Respondents ages 25-30 were 4.73% and respondents ages 30-40 were 4.14%. Only 1.78% were respondents 40-50 and 1.18% of respondents were from 50-60.



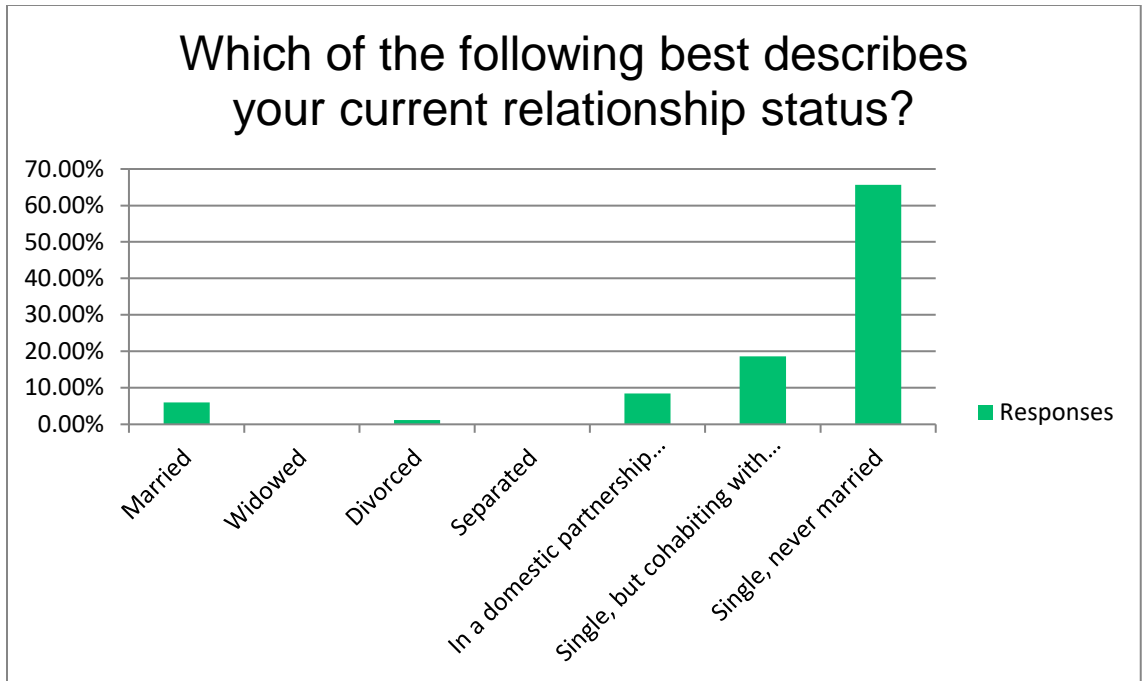
Participant's current gender identity ranged from: male, female, trans female, genderqueer/gender non-conforming, and different identity. Majority of respondents were female at 79.88%. Second was male at 17.16%. Third was genderqueer/gender non-conforming and different identity at 1.18%. Fourth was trans female at .59%.



There were varying levels of employment status ranging from: employed, working full time, employed working part-time, not employed, looking for work, not employed, not looking for work, not employed, full-time student, employed, full-time student, and disabled, not able to work. Majority of respondents were employed, full-time student at 37.65%. Second was employed, working part-time at 23.49%. Third was employed, working full-time at 19.28%. Fourth was not employed, full-time student at 15.06%. Fifth was not employed, looking for work at 3.01%. Sixth was not employed, not looking for work at 1.81%. Finally there was disabled not able to work at .60%.



Participant's current relationship status ranged from: married, divorced, in a domestic partnership or civil union, single but cohabiting with a significant other, and single, never married. Majority of respondents were single, never married at 65.66%. Second was single but cohabiting with a significant other at 18.67%. Third was in a domestic partnership or civil union at 8.43%. Fourth was married at 6.02%. Finally there was divorced at 1.2%. No respondents were widowed or separated.



Questionnaire

The following is the questionnaire that was used research potential stigma, opinions, and market of professional cuddling. It was designed to ensure that it was short enough that participants would not get bored taking it, but long enough to thoroughly understand the stigmas, opinions, and potential market for professional cuddling.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current gender Identity?
3. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
4. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status
5. Have you ever participated in cuddling?
6. Have you participated in cuddling with a person or object. Select all that apply
7. I enjoyed the cuddling experience
8. I would recommend the experience to others
9. I think cuddling is sexual
10. I would cuddle a stranger
11. Have you ever heard of professional cuddling?
12. If so from where?
13. I have heard of organizations like Snuggle Buddies, Cuddlist, Cuddle Comfort, or Cuddle Party?
14. Have you ever participated in professional cuddling?
15. I enjoyed my professional cuddling experience
16. I would recommend professional cuddling services to others based on my experience
17. I would participate in professional cuddling
18. If you were to participate in professional cuddling, what gender would you prefer the cuddler to be?

19. How much would you pay per hour for professional cuddling?
20. If a cuddling service opened a store front near you I would go there
21. If the cuddler offered service in your home, their home, or another place (e.g hotel) which would you prefer?
22. What are your opinions on professional cuddling?
23. I think professional cuddling is moral
24. I think professional cuddling is similar to prostitution
25. I would negatively judge someone who participated in professional cuddling (i.e the customer)
26. I would negatively judge the professional cuddler.

Results

Out of the one-hundred and sixty-four respondents 97.58% have participated in cuddling, while 2.42% had not. Out of those who had participated in cuddling 83.64% had cuddled with their significant other; another 58.18% had cuddled with family. Many participants cuddled with a pet, about 81.21%. Several cuddled with a friend about 75.76%. A large majority cuddled with a body pillow/object at 83.64%. Finally 1.82% cuddled with other type of object or person which they specified.

Out of the people who had cuddled 65.24% had strongly agreed to enjoy the experience and 26.83% agreed to enjoy the experience. This creates a total of 92.07% of participants who enjoyed the experience of cuddling. Some participates neither disagreed nor agree with enjoying the cuddling experience, about 2.44%. Some participants disagree or strongly disagreed with enjoying the cuddle experience, 1.22% and 4.27%.

Most of the people who had cuddled 57.93% strongly agreed to recommend the cuddling experience to others and 26.83% agreed. This creates a total of 84.76% of participants who would recommend the experience to others. Some participates neither disagreed nor agree to recommend the experience to others about 9.76%. A small amount of participants did not recommend the experience to other either disagree at 0.61% or strongly disagree at 4.88%.

Out of one-hundred and sixty-four participants some thought that cuddling was sexual, 2.44% strongly agreed it was, while 10.98% agreed it was. A vast majority neither disagreed nor agreed that cuddling as sexual at 39.02%. Many thought cuddling was not sexual disagreeing at 35.37% or strongly disagreeing at 12.20%.

On whether or not they would cuddle a stranger 3.05% strongly agreed and 12.80% agreed. About 18.29% neither disagreed nor agreed if they would cuddle a stranger. A vast majority would not cuddle a stranger, 28.66% disagreed and 37.20% strongly disagreed.

A majority of participants had heard of professional cuddling with 11.66% saying they had heard a lot and 57.67% saying they heard a little. A small percent of people said maybe at 3.07%. Finally some people said no, they had not heard anything at 27.61%.

Of the people who have heard of professional cuddling 32.91% had heard about it through Buzzfeed. A small percentage had heard about it from the New York Times or Business Insider 1.90% and 1.27%. A decent portion heard from a friend or family at 17.72%. There was also other category where 18.99% people specified, examples would be the internet. Finally 27.22% had not heard of professional cuddling.

A majority of participants had not heard of organizations like Snuggle Buddies, Cuddlist, Cuddle Comfort, or Cuddle Party with 55.56% strongly disagreed and 30.25% disagree. Some participants neither disagreed nor agreed at 7.41%. A very small percentage had heard of these companies at 4.94% agreed and 1.85% strongly agree.

A vast majority of participants had not participated in professional cuddling, at 99.38%. There was one participant who had making them the .62%. This one participant strongly agreed that they enjoyed their professional cuddling experience. This .62% would also strong agree to recommend the professional cuddling service to others.

A majority of participants would not participate in professional cuddling, with 31.87% strong disagreed and 21.88% disagreed. Some participants neither disagreed nor agreed to participate in professional cuddling at 24.38%. A small percentage would participate in professional cuddling with 17.50% agreed and 4.38% strongly agreed.

When asked the gender of who they would participate in professional cuddling with participants had mixed results, with 23.13% preferring male, 21.88% preferring female, 21.25% preferring either. There was also a 33.75% who would not participate in professional cuddling.

A vast majority of people would pay professional cuddling \$0-\$20 an hour at 72.55%. The next majority would pay \$21-\$40 at 17.65% and 5.88% would pay \$41-\$60. Some participants would be willing to pay \$61-\$80 and \$80+ at 1.96%.

A majority of participants would not go to a store front cuddling service with 34.38% strongly disagreed and 23.13% disagree. Many participants were neutral towards the store front at 27.50%. Some participants were for the store front with 13.75% agreed and 1.25% strongly agreed.

If a cuddler offered their service outside a store front, 41.13% of participants would prefer their home. 5.63% of participants would prefer to go to the professional cuddlers home. Many participants would prefer another location like a hotel at 17.50%. There were 33.75% participants who would prefer a storefront e.g. a cuddling store.

Out of one-hundred and sixty-nine participants, one-hundred and fifty-three answered on their opinions on professional cuddling. Some encouraged professional cuddling with 9.15% strongly encouraged and 21.57% mildly encourage. A vast majority were natural at 43.14%. Some mildly discouraged at 16.99% or strongly discouraged at 9.15%.

On the morality of professional cuddling one-hundred and fifty-four participants gave mixed results. Some agreed at 33.77% or strongly agreed at 15.58% that professional cuddling was moral. A large majority at 42.21% neither disagreed nor agreed with the morality of professional cuddling. Some thought it was immoral with 3.25% disagreed and 5.19% strongly disagreed.

Out of one-hundred and fifty-four participants 35.06% strongly disagreed that professional cuddling was similar to prostitution, with 39.61% disagreed. Many people neither disagreed nor agreed at 15.58%. Some people agreed at 8.44% or strongly agreed with 1.30%.

On whether the participant would negatively judge someone who participated in professional cuddling 37.66% strongly disagree, meaning they would not judge someone who did, and 31.17% disagree. Some participants neither disagreed nor agreed at 14.94%. A few participants agreed with 12.34% or strongly agreed with 3.90%.

A vast majority of participants would not negatively judge the professional cuddler with 38.96% strongly disagreed and 35.06% disagreed. Some participants neither disagreed nor agreed at 14.94%. A few would judge the professional cuddler with 6.49% agreed and 4.55% strongly agreed.

Analysis

A vast majority of people who were surveyed enjoyed cuddling and would recommend the experience to others. This demonstrates that the service offered by professional cuddlers would most likely be thoroughly enjoyed since most people enjoy cuddling. This potential enjoyment of professional cuddling would work in the favor of a professional cuddling business, because the likelihood of recommending the experience to others is fairly high.

Data analysis revealed that out of all the people who would participate in professional cuddling, men were more likely to participate. This means out of 17.50% that agreed and the

4.38% that strongly agreed it is more likely for a man to participate in professional cuddling. This would help to shape a marketing plan, since it would benefit a company to market more towards men than women.

Very few people had heard of professional cuddling companies like Snuggle Buddies or Cuddlist, which demonstrates a lack of marketing of these companies. In many industries potential customers will have heard of companies long before they may engage with their products. It would be highly beneficial for a professional cuddling company to have a strong enough marketing plan to attract people to the industry before they even think of engaging in with the service of professional cuddling.

Since only one participant out of one-hundred and sixty-nine people had participated in professional cuddling it strongly demonstrates the how much of a niche market professional cuddling is. Though the professional cuddling market is niche, so long as a professional cuddling business appeals to this niche market they should be moderately successful.

Based on the gender of the professional cuddler, clients appear to be open to men and women as their professional cuddler. This is excellent from a hiring stand point for a professional cuddling company, because it means a company can hire without a gender bias in mind. This will make for a better company.

Majority of people would only pay \$0-\$20 per hour for a professional cuddler. This is an issue because the industry average ranges from \$60-\$80 per hour. A discrepancy in what a consumer is willing to pay versus how much they are expected to pay, may result in the loss of potential customers. However, it would not benefit a company to decrease their prices because of how much emotional support goes into professional cuddling. This service is deeply intimate and requires appropriate compensation of the professional cuddler.

Most of the people surveyed would not go to a professional cuddling company if they had a store front. This is excellent to know if a professional cuddling company was considering opening a store front like Cuddle Party. However as demonstrated, many potential clients would prefer to be cuddled in their home, so offering an outpatient service would benefit a company.

The opinions on professional cuddling are mixed. Majority of respondents were neutral to the idea of professional cuddling. This offers an opportunity for a professional cuddling company to potentially gain customers. When people are unsure about their opinions about an industry, proper marketing can help influence and change how they feel. Neutral is not necessarily bad, because there is a potential for change.

According to this survey there is minimal stigma for both the client of a professional cuddler as well as the professional cuddler. This is excellent news for creating a business because the clients and the professionals would face fewer stigmas against their work than expected.

Due to the responses it is unclear what people think of the morality of professional cuddling. While a vast majority agreed it is moral, many neither disagreed nor agreed, creating a gray area. This gray area could impact a potential client of a professional cuddling company. Similarly it was unclear what participants thought of professional cuddling in comparison to prostitution, with some participants neither disagreed nor agreed or some agreed that professional cuddling was similar to prostitution. While there is no outside regulation of professional cuddling, the question about whether it is moral or similar to prostitution may prompt regulations that may impact the businesses in the industry.

Conclusion

Overall this research demonstrates that there is a market for professional cuddling. The market is extremely niche and would require a significant amount marketing to gain more

customers, due to the large majority of neutral opinions. There is minimal stigma for the professional cuddler and the client, which can be used as a tool to sooth the potential concern of clients. A potential professional cuddling company should focus on a niche market through innovative marketing and spreading more knowledge about professional cuddling.

Business Plan

Executive Summary

Cuddle Company LLC is a professional cuddling company located in Massachusetts that focused on platonic touch and touch therapy. The business will be set up by Emily M Pike, who will also be the sole cuddler and manager. Through in and out care and extensive training Cuddle Company LLC cuddlers will provide platonic touch through companioning, spooning, hand holding, talking, and spending time with their clients.

Location

The official location of the cuddler will be Worcester, Massachusetts, but she will be willing to travel throughout the state of Massachusetts. Worcester is at the center of Massachusetts and will allow for easy access to all of the state. Utilizing public transportation, the cuddler can access a significant amount of Massachusetts; should the cuddler get a car she will be able to access all other areas of Massachusetts.

Competitive Edge

Cuddle Company LLC will provide extensive training to its cuddlers to ensure a quality product. All of this training will be free and done online at the ease of the professional cuddler. There will also be a contract that helps to ensure the safety of the client and the professional cuddler.

The location of Cuddle Company LLC is an advantage, because there is a lack of professional cuddlers in the state of Massachusetts, as observed from sites like Snuggle Buddies

and Cuddlist. By having a company based in an area with limited competition, Cuddle Company LLC has a great potential to grow.

Financial Information

Cuddle Company LLC will be inexpensive to get off the ground, needing only about \$3000 to get started. These costs include attorney fees, starting an LLC, and website design and implementation. With only 38 one-hour sessions or 8 overnights need to break even, Cuddle Company LLC has a lot of flexibility with getting potential clients.

Company Summary

Cuddle Company LLC is a professional cuddling company dedicated to platonic touch and touch therapy. Through our in care and out care, we provide a service like no other. All our cuddlers are trained to give the best service possible. We believe that touch is healing and essential for human life.

Company Logo

Designed by a Salem State Alumni Mariah Pike, the logo for Cuddle Company LLC is a reflection of the company. The heart is to represent two people hugging or cuddling, while the clubs are meant to look like hands in the middle of a hug. The clubs also represent life and happiness. The color choice is soft and gentle to appeal to the consumer.



Start-up Summary

The start-up cost for Cuddle Company LLC will be about \$3,000. Since Emily M Pike will be the only cuddler the cost will be lower than if she started with other employees. Cuddle Company will run through a business page on Facebook that allows messaging, file upload, and

community conversation. There will also be a website like competitors it could cost anywhere from \$5.38 per month if a site like Website Builder is used or about \$1000 if WordPress is used (How Much Should, 2018). There will also be the legal costs to start the company; for a lawyer the cost will vary wildly depending on where Cuddle Company goes, but it typically will cost \$1,500 or higher (How Much Does, 2018). All of these costs will be covered by Emily M Pike's capital, since she does not have any investors.

Company Ownership

Cuddle Company is a LLC with a single owner. The single owner will be Emily M Pike.

Services

Cuddle Company will provide a single service in the form of a one hour to overnight cuddling session. The cost of a one hour session will be \$80 an hour and overnight will be a flat rate of \$400. Many things could happen during the cuddle session ranging from companionship (sitting next to a person), talking, spooning, hugging, hand holding, etc. Nothing of a sexual nature will occur as per agreement of both the cuddler and client through signing a contract.

Opportunity

There is a huge opportunity for the market of professional cuddling. Since this is a growing industry more people are becoming informed and investigating into how they can get professionally cuddled. Through articles in Business Insider and the Wall Street Journal cuddle companies are becoming better known.

Many people who use professional cuddling are divorced, lonely, or cannot get contact through other means (Herman, 2015). Cuddle Company LLC would provide the service for platonic touch that is desperately needed in Massachusetts. There are limited cuddlers in Massachusetts, so it may be more difficult for people to get the touch they need with such a

limited supply based on sites like Snuggle Buddies and Cuddlist. This is why it is essential that Cuddle Company LLC takes off.

Market Analysis

The companies in this industry are Snuggle Buddies, Cuddlist, Cuddle Party, Cuddle Comfort, Certified Cuddler, and Cuddle Sanctuary. These firms tend to charge \$60-\$80 per hour (Pricing, Snuggle Buddies). For overnights they charge anywhere from \$330- \$400 (Pricing, Snuggle Buddies). There is minimal marketing in this industry, with most people learning about professional cuddling from word-of-mouth, recommendations, or from articles and videos about professional cuddling. There is a famous Buzzfeed video where Buzzfeed employees cuddle with professional cuddlers that brought a lot of attention to the industry (People Spoon, 2015).

This market is nationwide and international. Snuggle Buddies as an option for all fifty states to choose a cuddler from, but given the state it may be extremely difficult to book an appointment with a cuddler. Cuddle Comfort also covers all 50 states, as well as work extremely well on mobile. Certified Cuddles is in the United States as well as international, including places like Germany.

According to Cuddlist's website, Cuddlist does the United States and Canada. In the Boston area there are three cuddlers available, so having a Massachusetts based company would be highly beneficial since they have limited options. Cuddlist also requires all of its cuddlers to be trained with their specific program for the cost of \$149, with a monthly membership fee of \$39.99 (Become a Cuddlist). Due to the membership fee, Cuddlist does not take anything from the session, so the entire cost of \$80 per hour goes to the cuddler (Become a Cuddlist).

Cuddle Party offers both training to become a professional cuddler as well as hosts cuddle parties around the United States and in the United Kingdom (About Us). However, unlike other services Cuddle Party sometimes does not charge for cuddling, accepting donations at

event, although some events have tickets, ranging from \$30-\$40 (Boston). The events are held at discrete venues (Boston). Cuddle Party does charge for training to become a Cuddle Party Facilitator (About US).

Execution

Marketing Plan

Cuddle Company LLC will market itself through the use of Twitter and Facebook.

Through tweets and Facebook posts we can update clients on potential sales or discounts that could be offered. It is easy to run a Twitter and Facebook and has minimal cost to the company to run a platform on these sites. However, advertising on Facebook does cost a significant amount, depending on the type of advertisement, the cost varies (How Much, 2017). If a company decides to measure cost per click it's about \$.27 per a click; however if a company is using cost per thousands impressions it costs about \$7.19 (How Much, 2017).

Cuddle Company LLC would avoid social media like Snapchat and Instagram to ensure the confidentiality of clients. In many of the articles about professional cuddling, clients names and faces are not mentioned and Cuddle Company will continue with that trend.

Cuddle Company LLC will also release an educational video about professional cuddling, its benefits, and the services offered. This video will be posted on Facebook and shared throughout the platform. The video will include me explaining professional cuddling, demonstrating what could happen on a client through example, and ending with contact information and the website.

With enough time Cuddle Company LLC will get an article written about it, like many other cuddling companies have and that will serve as free public relations. Articles have shown up in Business Insider, the Rolling Stones, and other such platforms.

Cuddle Company LLC would market more towards men than women, because according to the study above more men are interested in cuddling than women. This would be done by having advertisements on men's health pages and the like. This would encourage men to potentially click on the link and visit Cuddle Company's site.

Sales Plan

While Cuddle Company LLC plans to market more towards men than women, the overall target market would be anyone over the age of eighteen. Due to the nature of the service all clients would need to be eighteen years or older. In addition since minors cannot sign a contract they would also be unable to participate.

Since Cuddle Company LLC is located in Massachusetts and would be focused on serving the entire state. The official location for the cuddler will be Worcester, but the cuddler will be willing to travel throughout Massachusetts. Originally with one cuddler this will result in significant travel time, but as more cuddlers are added when sales grow, this travel time will be cut down.

Important milestones for the company would be getting at least five clients weekly. This would enable the minimum profit of \$400, which with few expenses this is a great starting point. As the business grows more clients are expected as Cuddler Company LLC makes a name for itself.

Location and Facilities

There will be no official facility for Cuddle Company LLC to start. The company and all its paper work will be run from Emily M Pike's home. Since there is no official facility this will

cut down on costs. However as the company grows it would look into renting out an office space for filing paper work and the like.

Company and Management

Emily M Pike would be the sole owner, manager, and employee of Cuddle Company to start. This will cut down on costs; however in the future she intends to hire more cuddlers to expand her business nationwide. All employees will undergo rigorous training to ensure they understand the policies of the company and how to cuddle. Unlike Cuddlist, Cuddle Company will not charge for training to become a professional cuddling.

All employees will be required to sign a contract stating they understand what they are under taking being a professional cuddler, such as the need to travel to client's home, hotels, or public spaces, that they will be platonically touching clients, and the expectations of Cuddle Company. This contract will also include that nothing sexual will happen at any time with the client. The client will also sign a similar document. Cuddlers are encouraged to Skype, call, or meet their clients in public space before they go into a session. This will ensure that they are safer and can choose not to participate in any sessions where they feel unsafe. This is the method followed by the many professional cuddlers (Herman 2015).

Financial Plan

The cost of creating the website would be about \$1,000 which would include designing the website (How Much Should, 2018). The logo has already been designed by a former Salem State Alumni Mariah Pike. The cost of a lawyer to draft the needed documents for an LLC would be about \$1,500 (How Much Does, 2018). Starting fees for LLCs in Massachusetts are about \$500 (Form an LLC, 2018). This would create a total cost of \$3,000. There is also travel cost,

which would be different from session to session, but would be about \$1 per a minute above 10 minutes of travel.

Each session costs about \$80 per hour with overnights being a flat rate of \$400. In order to break even Cuddle Company would need at least 38 one hour sessions or 8 overnights to break even. Depending on how much travel time is needed to get to the location of service, these numbers may fluctuate.

Conclusion

Professional cuddling is a niche market that is growing. This industry would benefit from a new company entering into the field to increase competition and raise awareness. Based on research few people have heard of professional cuddling companies and the industry would benefit from more exposure.

Cuddle Company LLC would be the company to help create greater exposure for the professional cuddling industry. While the company will start off small it has great potential to grow. Professional cuddling is an industry offering a much needed service that will hopefully grow for years to come.

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